

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010*

**Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Seoul, South Korea**

*November 11, 2010*

Hello, Yongsan! Oh, it is wonderful to be here. Give another round of applause to Army Specialist Courtney Newby for the great introduction.

A few other people that I want to just make mention of. We are so proud and want to thank our outstanding representatives here in the Republic of Korea, Ambassador Kathleen Stephens and General Skip Sharp. Please give them a big round of applause.

A former colleague of mine in the Illinois State Senate who is now a Congressman from the great State of Illinois, Peter Roskam, is with us here today. So give him a big round of applause. Where's Peter? Where is he? There he is up there.

And our great friend and ally from the Republic of Korea is here—General Jung is here. Give him a big round of applause—deputy commander, Combined Forces. A few other people I want to give thanks to: Lieutenant General John Johnson, Command Sergeant Major Robert Winzenried.

We are so proud to have with us U.S. and Republic of Korea vets of the Korean war who are here, and we are greatly honored by their presence. And I want to make special mention of one of them, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hector Cafferata, Jr. Please give him an extraordinary round of applause.

It is an enormous honor to be here at Yongsan Garrison. As President of the United States, I have no greater privilege than serving as Commander in Chief of the finest military that the world has ever known. And on this Veterans Day, there's no place I'd rather be than right here with U.S. Forces Korea.

We've got 8th Army in the house. We've got members of the 7th Air Force. We've got U.S. Navy Forces Korea. We've got just about every marine in South Korea here today. Happy birthday, Marines, by the way. And we've got a whole lot of DOD civilians too. So we are very proud of you.

It's good to see some spouses and family members in the audience. You bear the burden of your loved one's service in ways that are often immeasurable: an empty chair at the dinner table or another holiday where mom and dad are someplace far away. So I just want you to know that this Nation recognizes the sacrifices of families as well. And we are grateful for your service as well.

Now, on this day, we honor every man and woman who has ever worn the uniform of the United States of America. We salute fallen heroes and keep in our prayers those who are still in harm's way, like the men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We recall acts of uncommon bravery and selflessness. But we also remember that honoring those who've served is about more than the words we say on Veterans Day or Memorial Day. It's about how we treat our veterans every single day of the year. It's about making sure they have the care they need and the benefits that they've earned when they come home. It's about serving all of you as well as you've served the United States of America.

This has been one of my highest priorities since taking office. It's why I asked for one of the largest increases in the VA budget in the past 30 years. It's why we've dramatically increased funding for veterans' health care. It's why we're improving care for wounded warriors, especially those with posttraumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. It's why we're working to eliminate the backlog at the VA and reforming the entire process with electronic claims and medical records. It's why there are fewer homeless veterans on the streets than there were 2 years ago. It's why there are nearly 400,000 veterans and their families who are going to college because of the post-9/11 GI bill.

So I want all of you to know, when you come home, your country's going to be there for you. That is the commitment I make to you as Commander in Chief. That is the sacred trust between the United States of America and all who defend its ideals.

It's a trust that's been forged in places far from our shores, from the beaches of Europe to the jungles of Vietnam, from the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to the peninsula where we stand today.

Sixty years have come and gone since the Communist armies first crossed the 38th parallel. Within 3 days, they'd captured Seoul. By the end of the next month, they had driven the Korean Army all the way south to Pusan. And from where things stood in the summer of 1950, it didn't appear that the Republic of Korea would survive much longer.

At the time, many Americans had probably never heard of Korea. It had only been 5 years since we had finished fighting the last war. But we knew that if we allowed the unprovoked invasion of a free nation, then all free nations would be threatened. And so for the first time since its creation, the United Nations voted to use armed forces to repel the attack from North Korea.

And so on September 15, 1950, American forces landed at Inchon. The conditions they fought under were some of the worst that Americans had ever experienced. The temperatures reached more than 30 below zero in the winter, over 100 degrees in the summer. In many places, Americans and our Korean allies were outgunned and outmanned, sometimes by as much as 20 to 1. At one point, they were hit with 24,000 artillery shells a day. By the end, the fighting had sometimes devolved into trench warfare, waged on hands and knees in the middle of the night.

And yet our soldiers fought on. Nearly 37,000 Americans would give their lives in Korea—37,000. But after 3 years of fighting, our forces finally succeeded in driving the invading armies back over the 38th parallel. One war historian said that while he believed Korea was "the greatest of all trials" for American troops, their performance was "nothing short of miraculous."

Many of the men responsible for this miracle were only teenagers. Others had just finished fighting in the Second World War. Most would go home to raise their families and live out their lives. And 62 veterans of the Korean war have returned to be with us here today.

Gentlemen, we are honored by your presence. We are grateful for your service. The world is better off because of what you did here. And for those who can, I would ask that, again, you receive the thanks of a grateful nation. If any—actually, they're all standing now, so it looks like they're doing great. But please give them a big round of applause.

I also want to recognize the Korean soldiers who battled side by side with our own. These men fought bravely and sacrificed greatly for their country, and some of them have joined us here as well. So thank you, friends. *Katchi kapshida*—we go together.

The veterans who have traveled here today saw battle at the Inchon landing and the Pusan Perimeter. They survived the bloodshed at Heartbreak Ridge and the ambush at Chosin Reservoir. At one point in that battle, the enemy tossed a grenade into a trench where multiple marines lay wounded. And that is where Private Hector Cafferata ran into that trench, picked up that grenade, and threw it back. It detonated in his hand and severely injured his arm. But because of what he did, Private Cafferata saved the lives of his fellow marines. He received the Medal of Honor for his heroism. He is here today. Again, please give him an incredible—[applause].

Each of these men served their Nation with incredible courage and commitment. They left their homes and their families and risked their lives in what's often been called the forgotten war. So today we all want you to know this: We remember. We remember your courage; we remember your sacrifice. And the legacy of your service lives on in a free and prosperous Republic of Korea.

Real change comes slowly. Many people don't live to see the difference they've made in the lives of others. But for the men and women who have served on this peninsula, all you have to do is look around. Whether you're a veteran who landed in 1950 or one of the Yongsan troops today, the security you've provided has made possible one of the great success stories of our time.

There are Koreans who can still remember when this country was little more than rice paddies and villages that would flood during monsoon season. Not two generations later, highways and skyscrapers line the horizon of one of the most prosperous, fastest growing democracies in all of the world. That progress has transformed the lives of millions of people.

And you should know, one of these people is a man who went from grinding poverty to the Presidency of this country. When I visited last year, I had lunch with President Lee, who I'll be seeing later today, and he shared with me his story of what it was like growing up poor as a child in Korea. And he said, "I hope the American people understand how grateful we are for what you've done, because we would not be the strong, prosperous nation we are were it not for the sacrifices made by the men and women of the United States military." That's from the President of this country.

Because the Korean war ended where it began geographically, some ended up using the phrase "die for a tie" to describe the sacrifices of those who fought here. But as we look around in this thriving democracy and its grateful, hopeful citizens, one thing is clear: This was no tie. This was victory.

This was a victory then, and it is a victory today. And 60 years later, a friendship that was forged in a war has become an alliance that has led to greater security and untold progress, not only in the Republic of Korea, but throughout Asia. That is something that everyone here can be extraordinarily proud of.

Now, it's also a reminder of what still lies on the other side of the 38th parallel. Today, the Korean Peninsula provides the world's clearest contrast between a society that is open and a society that is closed, between a nation that is dynamic and growing and a government that would rather starve its people than change. It's a contrast that's so stark, you can see it from space, as the brilliant lights of Seoul give way to the utter darkness of the North.

This is not an accident of history. This is a direct result of the path that's been taken by North Korea, a path of confrontation and provocation, one that includes the pursuit of nuclear weapons and the attack on the *Cheonan* last March.

And in the wake of this aggression, Pyongyang should not be mistaken: The United States will never waver in our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea. We will not waver.

The alliance between our two nations has never been stronger, and along with the rest of the world, we've made it clear that the North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons will only lead to more isolation and less security for them.

There is another path available to North Korea. If they choose to fulfill their international obligations and commitments to the international community, they will have the chance to offer their people lives of growing opportunity instead of crushing poverty, a future of greater security and greater respect, a future that includes the prosperity and opportunity available to citizens on this end of the Korean Peninsula.

Until that day comes, the world can take comfort in knowing that the men and women of the United States Armed Forces are standing watch on freedom's frontier. In doing so, you carry on the legacy of service and sacrifice that we saw from those who landed here all those years ago. It's a legacy we honor and cherish on this Veterans Day.

At the Korean War Memorial in Washington, there's a plaque right near the inscription that lists the number of Americans who were killed, wounded, missing in action, and held as prisoners of war. And it says: "Our Nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met."

A country they never knew and a people they never met. I know of no better words to capture the selflessness and generosity of every man or woman who has ever worn the uniform of the United States of America. At a time when it has never been more tempting or accepted to pursue narrow self-interest and personal ambition, all of you here remind us that there are few things that are more fundamentally American than doing what we can to make a difference in the lives of others.

And that's why you'll always be the best that America has to offer the world. And that is why people who never met you, who never knew you, will always be grateful to the friend and ally they found in the United States of America.

So thank you for your service. May God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. at U.S. Army Garrison—Yongsan. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Walter L. "Skip" Sharp, USA, commander, United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea; Gen. Jung Seung-jo, Republic of Korea Army, deputy commander, Combined Forces Command; Lt. Gen. John D. Johnson, USA, commanding general, 8th U.S. Army, and chief of staff, United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea; CSM Robert A. Winzenried, USA, command sergeant major, United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea, and 8th U.S. Army; and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : South Korea :: Veterans Day ceremony in Seoul.

*Locations:* Seoul, South Korea.

*Names:* Cafferata, Hector A., Jr.; Johnson, John D.; Jung Seung-jo; Lee Myung-bak; Newby, Courtney; Roskam, Peter; Sharp, Walter L. "Skip"; Stephens, Kathleen; Winzenried, Robert A.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : GI bill legislation; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), treatment efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Traumatic brain injuries, treatment efforts; Decorations, medals, and awards : Congressional Medal of Honor; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; South Korea : Economic growth and development; South Korea : Navy patrol ship *Cheonan*, sinking; South Korea : President; South Korea : President Obama's visit; South Korea : Relations with U.S.; South Korea : U.S. Ambassador; Veterans : Benefits; Veterans : Health and administrative records, information technology; Veterans : Health care; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Funding; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Homelessness, assistance and mitigation efforts; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Medical care system, funding; Veterans Day.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201000969.